

DISCERNING CONSISTENT EVIDENCE-BASED COMMUNICATION  
STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING DEAF WRITERS IN THE FIRST YEAR  
COMPOSITION CLASSROOM: A STUDY

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## DEDICATION

Written in loving memory of Judith Arlene Meranda.

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The presented study contributes to growing and necessary research compilations that include the field of Deaf Education and First Year Composition. The central goal of this study is to better understand what d/Deaf students, American Sign Language interpreters, and writing instructors currently experience when working together in a mainstream writing classroom to conduct clear communication among all participants. To address the support of d/Deaf students in such environments, a review of current literature that intersects the fields of Deaf Education, Disability Studies, and Writing and Rhetoric was conducted. Then, an IRB approved general interview study was conducted with culturally Deaf students, mainstream writing educators, and a nationally certified interpreter of the Deaf. Although this research touches just the very edges of an entire situation of inquiry and discourse, it offers a starting point from which educators and researchers alike can continue to develop further analysis of communication techniques to support d/Deaf writers in the writing classroom at the college level.

Stephen Fox, PhD., Chair

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## **Chapter One: Introduction and Background**

My interest in d/Deaf<sup>1</sup> studies began during my undergraduate career at IUPUI, at which point I began learning American Sign Language (ASL) in tandem with my English Literature and Creative Writing studies. As I developed language, cultural, and analytical skills from the coursework provided, I began to conduct my own secondary research on Deaf writers, which ranged from 19th century essayists to modern Deaf poets. When I entered the IUPUI Master of Arts in English program, concentrating on Writing and Rhetoric, I became interested in researching the support of d/Deaf writers in mainstream colleges. My interest centralized around how d/Deaf students interact with their peers, interpreters, and educators specifically in the mainstream writing classroom, and how that communication process influences d/Deaf students' performance.

At the end of my career in the Master of Arts program, I began teaching in the First Year Composition (FYC) classroom to gain the hands-on experience necessary for looking at a classroom from the instructor's perspective. In order to bring my research interests and teaching experience together, I narrowed my research to focus on the support of d/Deaf students in a mainstream FYC classroom.

### **The Issue**

As I began my research, I quickly found that there is very little data that focuses on the support of d/Deaf students at the college level, let alone in a college level writing course. Over the past twenty years, Disability Studies have begun to inform the field of

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<sup>1</sup> "deaf" refers to the medical definition of hearing loss; "Deaf" refers to cultural deafness. In this study, I use the term "d/Deaf" to encompass all individuals who identify as culturally Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, hearing impaired, late-deafened, and/or deafdisabled. However, I specifically use the term "Deaf" for those who identify as culturally Deaf in this study.

Writing and Rhetoric with new texts that discuss disability and rhetoric such as Stephanie Kerschbaum's *Towards a New Rhetoric of Difference* and Rebecca Day Babcock's *Tell Me How It Reads: Tutoring Deaf and Hearing Students in the Writing Center*. There has also been a development of published articles that discuss how to effectively use diverse forms of multimodal composition, such as Janine Butler's "Embodied Caption in Multimodal Pedagogies" and Geoffrey Clegg's "Unheard Complaints: Integrating Captioning into Business and Professional Communication Presentations." However, I wanted to find information that specifically addresses the communication situation among d/Deaf and hearing students, interpreters, and instructors in full classroom settings, where educators maintain primary control over the practices and content used in that environment. Moreover, I wanted to approach the discussion primarily from the educators' position, as my questions centralize around the support and collaboration that they offer with students in the communication situation that I describe.

### Identifying d/Deaf Students' Needs in the Writing Classroom

Many instructors are unfamiliar with the unique and varied backgrounds that d/Deaf students have with language and culture, and thus are unsure of how to approach supporting each d/Deaf student they might teach. According to Donald F. Moores, a scholar of Deaf Studies, although educators recognize that these students typically need additional support, trends have historically shown teaching pedagogies to not adopt inclusive, accessible practices that support d/Deaf students' full access to the classroom and course content. Instead, these teaching practices have focused on the traditional set-up and use of lecture, full-class discussion, and group work to develop critical analysis

and thinking skills. In modern classrooms, typically if a student's primary language is a signed language, an interpreter is present to support communication with the d/Deaf student, while the remainder of the class uses spoken and written English. Students who sign are expected to gain knowledge distributed by conversation primarily from the interpreter, while those who do not use a signed language are expected to follow along as their peers do without pause. However, the effectiveness of such activities primarily rests on how the classroom functions between the students, interpreters, and educators.

When educators are unfamiliar with how to approach supporting students' language and communication access in the classroom, a risk of communication barriers develops. If communication barriers develop, the classroom becomes a stagnant, inaccessible learning space for d/Deaf students, and the students' literacy development significantly falls behind that of their peers. For many teachers of writing, perceived communication barriers present challenges for accomplishing course outcomes, which are set in place for the continued development of critical thinking and literacy skills via written and spoken discourse. With this concept in mind, I developed the question of whether instructors of First Year Composition (FYC) courses provide the necessary support for d/Deaf students to succeed in the writing classroom, and how that communication situation impacts student performance in the modern writing classroom.

Unlike their hearing peers, d/Deaf students face challenges of language development throughout their primary and secondary education because of their early language acquisition. Most d/Deaf students are not exposed to language before the age of 5, when they begin to attend school. According to Marschark et al.: "young deaf children

of hearing parents frequently do not have any truly accessible and competent language models, either for sign language or for spoken language” (qtd. in M. Smith).

According to Dorothy Taylor, a contributor to the SKI-HI curricula<sup>2</sup>, language development for d/Deaf children is eased when the child has language access early in their development. Taylor states:

About 90% of children who are deaf or hard of hearing in the United States are born into Hearing families, who use spoken language to communicate. A baby who cannot adequately hear the sounds of speech will have varying degrees of difficulty in learning the spoken language used by those around him. On the other hand, a deaf infant who has Deaf parents and initially learns language through signs, will be impacted in a different way. She will be able to easily learn a language (sign) from her parents but may still have the challenge of additionally learning the language of the Hearing world. (13-14)

Primarily, the degree to which a d/Deaf child learns spoken language depends on their range of hearing loss. However, d/Deaf children with access to sign language are provided a first language, which helps structure their cognitive understanding and processing of information. Such language development is significantly impacted on the language input being provided to the child. While hearing children develop language and interaction skills auditorily through vocal mimicking and incidental learning in addition to mimicking movements, d/Deaf children who learn sign language develop such skills manually through observing adults who sign and mimic movements and gestures. For example, hearing children who have access to vocal language learn to speak by “babbling,” or attempting to mimic vocal sounds made by their parents, while culturally

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<sup>2</sup> SKI-HI is a curriculum developed specifically for the education of d/Deaf children and their parents in early-education. The Indiana School for the Deaf supports the use of this curriculum in early-education settings to support parents’ knowledge of how to proceed in providing their d/Deaf child educational support.

Deaf children who have access to sign language learn to “babble” by attempting to mimic facial gestures and hand movements.

Such development in language during a child’s primary developmental years directly impacts their education and overall brain development over time, thus the lack of language that many d/Deaf students face significantly delays their academic growth. According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, during the early years of a child’s development, the brain forms over one million new neural connections every second. The Center states: “The emotional and physical health, social skills, and cognitive-linguistic capacities that emerge in the early years are all important for success in school, the workplace, and in the larger community” (“Brain Architecture”). If a child does not have full access to a language, they face the results of language deprivation, which leads them to lack significant skills needed to reach significant developmental milestones. Children who do not acquire such skills struggle with processing information, such as understanding concepts and differentiating between past, present, and future tenses. If a language is not established in a child’s mind, the child’s cognitive development becomes increasingly delayed as time passes until they are exposed to language.

If a child arrives to a kindergarten classroom with delayed skills, the educator must attempt to give more than a standard year’s worth (365 days) of growth to that student within the allotted time provided within the academic year (~180 days). For many d/Deaf students, the lack of a primary language is particularly detrimental to their academic development of learning to read and write. John Luckner explains the impact that the lack of a primary language has on d/Deaf students’ writing: “Unlike their hearing

peers who learn to read and write in a language they already know, many students who are deaf or hard of hearing learn to read and write while simultaneously learning their first language” (43). Such development is directly impacted by the language deprivation experienced prior to arriving to the classroom, and directly impacts how a child’s education may continue throughout their primary and secondary education. If that child arrives in the classroom behind, they sometimes remain behind through the remainder of their education, at no fault of the child.

Such deprivation of language directly impacts students’ literacy skills as well. Many studies in the field of Deaf Education show the median of d/Deaf students only reach a fourth- or fifth-grade reading level (Livingston; Albertini et al.; Nagle et al.). These results are directly impacted by the language acquisition that students may be provided or deprived of throughout their K-12 education. Students who demonstrate higher reading levels have higher access rates to post-secondary education.

Because of the variety of language and educational experiences that a d/Deaf student may have had prior to entering postsecondary education, each d/Deaf student a college educator interacts with presents a separate set of potential challenges to meet their needs. Thus, there is no “right” way of teaching these students. Annemarie Ross, a culturally Deaf professor of Science and Mathematics at the Rochester Institute for the Deaf, recognizes this development of teaching practices as a process:

We all want to improve our teaching and we all want to be thought of as inclusive of diverse students. However, many think that by adopting new visions for teaching, important adaptations naturally follow. My experience is that this is rarely the case. Shifts in my teaching, as well as the trusted colleagues around me, result from deliberate changes and exposure of routine failures. They are results of ruthless openness and precisely measured approaches. Improving our teaching is a deeply personal endeavor but a task to be pursued in the light of a rich research

base for examining teaching—a research tradition I until now had not adequately consulted, nor most of my engineering colleagues. (Ross and Yerrick 13)

The end-goal of any teacher's practice is to include and support all students in the classroom, regardless of how diverse their student body is. When a student's cultural and access-based needs are met, they gain equal inclusion to all class activities and functions. Discussion of the inclusivity and support of d/Deaf students continues to remain a flexible, ever-changing experience across all disciplines of education, and requires more research for the development of novel teaching practices and teaching philosophies.

Before beginning discussions of best supporting practices for d/Deaf students, it is important to calculate the academic progress that these students are achieving. In the following section, I present the current statistics of d/Deaf students' postsecondary achievements in order to identify the current rate at which d/Deaf students are obtaining post-secondary degrees, with a particular focus on d/Deaf students in Indiana, where my study was conducted.

### *Current Statistics of d/Deaf Students in Postsecondary Institutions*

In most mainstream K-12 schools since the 1990s, d/Deaf students have been integrated into general classrooms rather than being placed into special education programs. According to Shirin Antia, about 75% of d/Deaf children are currently placed into mainstream schools. Parallel to these results in primary and secondary education, the number of d/Deaf students beginning to enroll in college has consistently risen over the past twenty years. According to a 2010 study conducted by L. Newman et al., 75% of

d/Deaf students who graduate from high school now attend a postsecondary institution quickly after graduation (qtd. in Nagle et al. 471).

Carrie Lou Garberoglio et al. collected 5-year estimates of data for individuals ranging in age from 25 to 64 from the American Community Survey (ACS) conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2017 for a report of d/Deaf students' postsecondary achievements. This age bracket was chosen because the survey participants were more likely to have completed postsecondary education and training. Because the U.S. Census Bureau collects data based on functionality, the variable hearing difficulties was used to differentiate data between deaf and hearing participants, and they use the term deaf to be all-encompassing (3). The researchers conducted their study at both the national and state levels; the following statistics are specifically for the State of Indiana, as my research study focuses on the support of deaf students at a university in this state. The reported statistics show that 3% of Indiana's population between the ages of 25 and 64 are deaf. They also found that while 58% of hearing individuals completed some college, only 44% of deaf individuals reached this academic level. In addition, while 26% of hearing individuals completed a bachelor's degree, only 12% of deaf individuals completed a degree (Garberoglio et al. 3). Potential factors that lead to these results may include the impact of incidental learning, which is primarily learned through spoken discourse, translation gaps between spoken and signed discourses, and/or ineffective teaching and communication practices used to support these students.



## Overview and Layout of the Study

The following study is an attempt to begin necessary research of d/Deaf writers at the college level with the central goal to better understand what d/Deaf students, interpreters, and educators currently are experiencing when working together in a mainstream classroom environment where the goal is to support continued writing development. The study provides useful inquiry not only for the development of inclusive writing practices for d/Deaf students, but also for the development of accessible practices that support clear communication to all classroom participants. It would be best to consider this study to be a narrow opening that will hopefully support future research regarding well-rounded supportive communication strategies to use with these students and their hearing peers in mainstream classrooms. Although this research touches just the very edges of an entire situation of inquiry and discourse, it offers a starting point from which educators and researchers alike can continue to develop further analysis of communication techniques to support d/Deaf writers in the FYC classroom.

To achieve my goals of understanding the current communication situation in the writing classroom, I present the study in five chapters. The current chapter provides an overview of the issue at hand—a lack of literature and resources that discuss the communication situation found in mainstream writing classrooms, and it also discusses the methodology used in the study, which immediately follows this section. The second chapter presents a variety of the current support strategies offered to d/Deaf students at the college level and a brief history of Deaf Education as it relates to writing and language development. The inclusion of this history helps to inform educators about d/Deaf students' relationships with language and writing development through their K-12

experiences, which then inform their college experiences. In the third chapter, I present the results of a case study that I completed at a regionally accredited university located in the state of Indiana to learn about d/Deaf students' communication experiences in the writing classroom, and to identify productive practices for supporting those students. The fourth chapter of this project discusses the results of the conducted study. The fifth and final chapter concludes this study and calls for future research on this topic. The remainder of this chapter discusses the methodology used for both the primary and secondary research included in this study.

### *Methodology*

Currently, there are very few discussions of how to support writing educators' teaching of and communication with d/Deaf students. To address this current gap in the literature at the college level, I conducted a case study at a regionally accredited university's writing program in the state of Indiana. This study uses two methods of qualitative research. First, I conducted a review of the literature to show what scholars currently state about d/Deaf students in education and the support that d/Deaf students receive in academic settings. I then conducted an IRB approved, unfunded qualitative research study in the form of general interviews to gain a better understanding of how a particular writing program currently supports their students. The methods used present the various factors that impact the communication situation that takes place between d/Deaf students, educators, and interpreters alongside individual reflections on that communication process from each group.

## *Secondary Research*

As I began to plan the secondary research that I would need to complete, I wanted to focus on texts that discuss d/Deaf literacy. Of most importance, the impact that social, governmental, and technological factors have had on d/Deaf students in K-12 education has impacted the way that teachers of college writing approach supporting their students, the way these students learn, and the way that these students approach their postsecondary education. To reflect the impact of these factors, I narrowed the scope of my research to focus on literature that discusses d/Deaf students' writing development at the college level published within the past twenty years. Although it is older than the initial timeframe I had set, I kept Sue Livingston's 1997 publication *Rethinking the Education of Deaf Students: Theories and Practice from a Teacher's Perspective* as one of my selected texts. I had found it early on in my research after using the search term "deaf literacy" to find books discussing the topic at hand. I was interested in Livingston's framework, which focuses on the development of meaning-making skills rather than the linguistic-based analysis of d/Deaf students' writing progress. These same values of meaning-making are supported by prominent figures in the field of Writing and Rhetoric in the text *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts in Writing Studies*, edited by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, which attempts to recognize and identify key concepts associated with writing studies.

One of the main resources that provides a large amount of data for the field of Writing and Rhetoric is "CompPile," provided by the *WAC Clearinghouse*. When reviewing the database using the word *deaf*, I found that there have been very few studies published within the past twenty years that discuss the support of d/Deaf students'

literacy acquisition at the college level. I then expanded my research sources to include *ERIC* and other databases such as *Project Muse* and *JSTOR*. I also searched through books that discuss Deaf Education and literacy, such as the 2010 publication of *The Oxford Handbook of Deaf Studies, Language, and Education*, Vol. 2, edited by Marc Marschark and Patricia E. Spencer, to find key information that would support my inquiry.

Once I collected my sources, I reviewed the texts for common themes and patterns to offer an overview of how the practices of language instruction in the field of Deaf Education have shifted over time. I also provide information regarding the university where I conducted my study, including the accessibility and educational support provided to d/Deaf students and a synopsis of the FYC course taught at this university.

### *Primary Research*

The development of a live study was integral to understand what d/Deaf students, their educators, and ASL interpreters experience in the writing classroom when supporting d/Deaf students' communication. In order to gain accurate, current knowledge of how d/Deaf students are supported in mainstream FYC classrooms as a step toward bridging the gap in current literature regarding the support of d/Deaf students, I conducted an unfunded qualitative research study at a regionally accredited university in Indiana in the form of general interviews. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes to an hour in one-to-one settings. I used a general interview guide approach to conduct the

interviews; each question was left open-ended for the conversation to be adaptable to what the interviewees would like to contribute to the discussion.

I first interviewed two d/Deaf individuals who have taken FYC in the past; they discussed their experiences of working with interpreters and their educators. I then interviewed three instructors of English who have experience teaching d/Deaf students in the university's FYC program to learn about their experiences and identify practices that they found to be productive for supporting those students. Finally, I interviewed the director of the university's American Sign Language (ASL)/English Interpreting program to learn about supportive communication practices and the interpreter's role in writing education environments. The director is a nationally certified interpreter for the Deaf who has worked with both d/Deaf students and educators in writing settings.

To capture the interviews that I conducted in ASL with the Deaf participants, I video recorded the interviews for later review and translation. To capture all other interviews, which were conducted in English, I took copious notes for later review and transcription. To maintain participants' privacy, I identify each participant in relation to the group and order in which I categorized and interviewed them. I refer to the d/Deaf participants as Student 1 and Student 2, I identify the instructors as Instructor 1, Instructor 2, and Instructor 3, and refer to the director of the ASL program as "the director."

The number of deaf students on the campus where I conducted my study is currently very small. Because of this factor, very few educators who teach there have worked with this demographic. I narrowed my review of supporting d/Deaf students in writing classrooms to focus on the FYC course because of my current knowledge of the

course and program, and to focus the pool of potential study participants. The director of the ASL interpreting program introduced me to two Deaf individuals who currently work with the university's ASL Interpreting Lab, and each agreed to be interviewed.

As I began networking to find instructors who have taught d/Deaf students at the university, I found a handful who confirmed that they had worked with d/Deaf students in the past and would be interested in being interviewed. All participating instructors confirmed that when they first were introduced to teaching d/Deaf students, they were unsure of how to approach supporting them. However, since gaining experience teaching and communicating with multiple students of this demographic in live classroom settings, they have each developed skills and approaches that support d/Deaf students' learning in the writing classroom.

The questions provided to the Deaf participants regarded their experience in the FYC class, including what they liked and disliked about the class, and what they thought could be improved. I asked each professor about their first experience teaching a d/Deaf student in a mainstream classroom, what they learned from that experience, and what they wish they had known. When I interviewed the interpreter, I asked about the process of working alongside educators, the strategies she used when working with d/Deaf writers, and where improvements could be made for the support of the communication process that takes place.

## **Chapter Two: Deaf Education and the Writing Classroom**

With the advancement and continued development of language acquisition practices, legal policies, and technology, d/Deaf students have constantly been exposed to a variety of situations in which they have needed to adjust and adapt to predominant social and educational norms to succeed. As a d/Deaf child completes each level of their education, their knowledge and literacy skills increase, but complications caused by a lack of access to language in their early childhood development may continue to be shown in their academic performance throughout the remainder of their academic careers. Other factors, such as support provided by the school system or university, may also greatly impact a d/Deaf student's transfer from secondary to postsecondary education. With each factor involved, their self-advocacy, language, and literacy skills leading up to the college composition classroom are impacted in a positive or negative way depending on how the child is supported and treated over time. Their experience in the college composition classroom also becomes a factor in how they approach their own language and learning development overall as their education continues through the remainder of their undergraduate career.

Deaf Education has recent origins at the global level. As Moores states: "It was not until the 20th century that the education of deaf people spread across the world and, even today, it is still not universal. There are hundreds of thousands of deaf children who have not spent a day in school" (19). The traditional goal for Deaf Education has been primarily to support these students' language development, especially in writing, so that they can succeed in the hearing-dominant environments that they live in. However, throughout much of the development of Deaf Education, the oppression of the d/Deaf has

continued—and at times has been re-enforced by—the development and use of audist<sup>3</sup> practices within education systems. Audist practices ignore deafness as an identity and instead seek to force these students to pass as “normal” hearing individuals in society.

What causes these kinds of oppressive practices? According to Christopher Krentz, the term *deaf* had been used in various negative contexts in 19th Century American literature:

In English, “deaf” not only means “does not hear,” but also has been associated with callousness, insensitivity, evil, insanity, and isolation; such meanings are inscribed in the language, its idioms (from “turn a deaf ear” to “dialogue of the deaf”), its metaphors, and very etymology. (24)

This dehumanization of deafness has reverberated through history and has influenced the way that many people regard d/Deaf students even today, including subjecting them to less-challenging tasks instead of challenging them to succeed because they are deemed incapable of continuing without the aid of a hearing person.

As indicated above, the lowercase form of the term *deaf* is used for the medical definition of hearing loss, and it is generally used in wider capacity by those who do not sign but have hearing loss. Those who use the term *deaf* typically aren’t involved with the Deaf community or use a signed language. To combat the negative views that the medical definition historically has had on their community, the Deaf community refers to their members by capitalizing the term. In doing so, the Deaf community visually separates themselves from the idea that they are disabled, as the medical term of deafness implies. Instead, the community supports the concept that members maintain a culture and language of their own, and that those who use the term *Deaf* are active members who use

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<sup>3</sup> Audism is social oppression or social dominance towards the d/Deaf, specifically for their inability to hear.



sign language as their primary language. Because of these differences in identity, researchers will often use the term d/Deaf to encompass all individuals who have deafness or are hard-of-hearing.

Additionally, a variety of language modality choices are available for d/Deaf students. Many of these choices were developed over time by hearing educators of d/Deaf students, who quickly began taking over and directing early Deaf Education systems in America (Marschark and Spencer; Moores; Krentz).

Such educators began to practice oralism, which intends to teach students language through speech or lip-reading rather than a signed language. Moores notes that by the 1920's, oralist schools became the norm for educational practices with most maintaining a predominantly hearing-only staff (26). Rather than permit culturally Deaf students to maintain their own signing practices, the students were expected to only use English.

The oralist method continues to be used as a form of language education for the d/Deaf in some hearing-led educational settings, but it has primarily been ruled out by the Deaf community. Marc Marschark and Patricia Elizabeth Spencer note the wide lack of evidence that oralist practices are effective:

Indeed, in terms of academic outcomes, there simply is no evidence that deaf children who utilize spoken language consistently achieve more than those who utilize sign language. [...] With regard to older children, there does not appear to be any evidence to indicate that, when other factors are held constant, spoken language has any advantage in facilitating either academic achievement or social-emotional development. Intuitively, one might expect such outcomes, but it is difficult to come up with any convincing explanation of why this would be the case. (5)

The current pedagogical practices in residential Deaf Schools and the Deaf Community demonstrate sign language as the primary and preferred form of communication.

Most educators in the field of Deaf education are hearing people who often do not develop fluency in American Sign Language. Such educators who work with d/Deaf students at ages 0-3 are often unable to provide the language acquisition support that the child needs at that level. Educators in early education may learn to teach “baby sign” to children, using basic nouns and verbs (i.e. “milk” and “hungry”) to teach the child, but may not be able to build that child’s language further.

### Language Acquisition for d/Deaf Students

The age at which a child begins to use language and communication is a primary factor of early cognitive development that influences the way that they both understand and use concepts through language. Language acquisition leads to the accomplishments of developmental milestones that demonstrate the child’s ability to process and use information for daily and academic tasks. Such development of language skills directly impacts the rest of their education and daily cognitive function. Because of the significant role that language acquisition plays in a child’s development, most of the data in Disability Studies and Deaf Education research that discusses d/Deaf writers focuses on children’s critical development of language and communication access between the ages of 2 and 5—when children develop the majority of their language skills. Such discussions primarily center around language deprivation, in which a child begins to lack necessary language skills because of an inability to access language.

Language deprivation may be caused by a variety of factors that impact a child’s early development, including the parents’ and/or educators’ ability to use an accessible language, such as sign language, and the range of access to language used in everyday

settings such as music, media, and written publications. Most parents of d/Deaf children are hearing and do not have any formal background knowledge of sign language or Deaf culture, and most parents overall do not have any formal background knowledge of language acquisition. While the parents of d/Deaf children learn about these topics, these parents mourn their child's deafness. Throughout the mother's pregnancy, the parents expect to have a healthy child who hears, but they are unprepared to learn that their child is d/Deaf. Taylor explains further:

Most parents of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing will go through this process, each in his or her own way. Hearing loss is relatively low in incidence and, in addition, more than 90% of children who are deaf are born into hearing families. Thus, most parents/caregivers of infants who are deaf or hard of hearing have little or no familiarity with hearing loss and are trying to understand it while dealing with their own emotional reactions. (14)

Most resources provided to parents of d/Deaf children early on are provided by medical professionals and other service providers who address deafness in its pathological definition, in that the child needs remedial resources and additional services.

Although service providers can guide and inform the parents of available choices, the parents must decide on their own what modality they prefer to use for their child's education. The information and resources provided may be biased towards a specific modality. For example, on the one hand, suggesting implementation of cochlear implants, speech therapy, and learning English may be provided. On the other hand, supporting the child with signed language may be provided instead. Such discussions are frequently argued about in the field of Deaf Education, especially when addressing the view of deafness in a pathological or cultural lens. The Deaf community shuns the use of cochlear implants and speech therapy in lieu of learning sign language, but which is guaranteed to

provide a child full access to language and the cognitive skills associated with language development at a comparable rate to their hearing peers. However, if early access to sign language is included as a modality option for the child's first language development, such as providing a child with cochlear implants and access to sign language, the community is generally more accepting of the practice.

### *Language Choices in Primary Education*

Further complicating parents' choices of modality is the choice of language practices provided by school systems. Modern American Schools for the Deaf provide research-driven, fully-accessible, and supportive practices that demonstrate effective, consistent results in d/Deaf students' language development. However, many parents choose to place their child into a mainstream setting, where the child may be expected to learn via a variety of learning methods other than sign language. The choices made based on such discussions of which school a d/Deaf child attends directly affects the primary language that they use, the quality and amount of accessible education that they receive, and their day-to-day interactions with others, and is decided on by the child's parents.

Deaf students whose primary language of communication is ASL constantly gain knowledge via both ASL and written English. Livingston explains further:

The more Deaf students know, regardless of the fact that this knowledge was created through the use of ASL, the more they bring to and, therefore, are able to use to comprehend their reading and to create their writing. The more Deaf students learn through their reading and writing, the more ideas get recycled back into their use of ASL. Languages, then, transfer at a cognitive, intellectual level—each influencing and enriching the other.  
(16)

For d/Deaf students, the transfer of knowledge between ASL and English provides them a potentially advantageous approach to understanding course materials, and such knowledge transfer ideally allows for them to succeed alongside their peers with equal opportunity if the students learn those skills of language transfer. Deborah Mutnick, a Professor of English and Co-director of LIU Brooklyn Learning Communities, and Steve Lamos, an Associate Professor in the Program for Writing and Rhetoric at the University of Colorado—Boulder, also encourage this in their discussion of supporting multilingual students in basic writing (BW) courses by using “translanguaging,” or developing skills to transfer knowledge between two languages. They state the following:

We feel that translanguaging is highly relevant to BW, serving as a critical approach to BW instruction that takes into account error-focused and academic initiation perspectives. It assumes that all students, especially multilingual students, can and should use their existing skills and talents to meet the demands of wider, more varied rhetorical situations. (31)

Such knowledge transfer, when integrated into the classroom, provides students the opportunity to delve into what they understand about the language that they use daily and how that knowledge can be interpreted by an audience for further inquiry.

### *Similarities between d/Deaf and L2 Students' Language and Writing Development*

The acquisition of a language by any child is a significant step in their education; for students who are Second Language (L2) students, this direction of language development is typically different than that of their native peers. Hearing L2 students may or may not be exposed to the L2 language at home in casual settings, which directly impacts their acquisition of that second language. However, those students have direct access to a first language. For example, the child of Spanish immigrants would develop

their parents' first language of Spanish, and they may learn English through listening to media, listening to their parents or relatives speak in English, and through daily interactions with native English speakers. Such development of language directly supports the child's ability to write in that second language as they learn the language. However, d/Deaf students born into hearing families typically have no access to a first language from which to learn a second language on. Without a first language and without auditory access to secondary sources of language such as media, d/Deaf students' language skills do not develop at the same rate as their hearing peers. Such lack of access to language in turn leads to d/Deaf students' written language skills to be much weaker than that of their hearing peers.

For many writers, learning how to write and develop their writing is also a process of developing self-confidence in their language use. The process of learning to write and succeed at writing takes encouragement and patience, and it is greatly influenced by the support, or lack thereof, from others. Andrea Lunsford, a contributor to *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, developed a two-year study to discuss students' writing memories. Lunsford found that most participants held negative emotions towards writing because of past experiences (54). For many d/Deaf students, their past experiences with language education lead them to have a negative outlook towards their literacy development. These negative outlooks are often impacted by the way that d/Deaf individuals are perceived by others for their writing processes and overall grammatical fluency. For example, Eileen Biser et al. explain that when d/Deaf students enter the workforce, such perceptions can greatly impact their work in negative ways:

They might choose to ignore the need to produce a text in Standardized Written American English and make a document public anyway, which could result in their being labeled ignorant or illiterate and relegate them to second-class citizenship. Or, many deaf writers might seek extensive intervention by others to help make their writing “correct” according to the conventions of Edited American English and effective as persuasive documents. (362)

In the same manner, other L2 students’ writing practices also tend to be greatly influenced by perception as well. These complexities are greatly entwined with the way that the English language has traditionally been considered a language of power and is the primary language of education, business, and interpersonal communications in America. Because of the language’s status, most L2 students in American schools strive to gain native fluency so that they aren’t criticized in the workplace based on their language development.

Paul Kei Matsuda and Matthew J. Hammill note in their discussion of teaching English to L2 writers that the students still face the difficulties of approaching that second language with confidence, as the students are still learning it. The authors explain:

One of the distinguishing characteristics of L2 writers in U.S. college composition courses is that they are in the process of developing *communicative competence* (Bachman) in English. Communicative competence involves not only the knowledge of grammar and discourse but also the awareness of appropriate ways of creating and maintaining social relationships with the audience as well as strategic knowledge, such as the knowledge of writing processes. (269)

For both L2 and d/Deaf students, the process of learning English is impacted by their literacy levels and past exposure to English, as well as how they approach learning language overall. While L2 students use phonetic, physical, and visual strategies to learn English by reading aloud, most d/Deaf students only have access to visual and physical strategies to develop language. Complicating d/Deaf students’ language acquisition and

the language acquisition of L2 students is the timeframe in which they learn their native and second language. Livingston states that L2 students are typically fully able to use their first language when learning a second, and thus are able to focus on learning one language; however, d/Deaf children must learn two (13). In turn, language deprivation of a visual signed language often inhibits a d/Deaf child's ability to grasp the second language they are learning.

Livingston also claims that in the 1990s, when her text was published, Deaf Education instructors tended to focus more on how meaning is translated between ASL and English because they thought that students needed to be aware of and use code switching between the two languages rather than focus on meaning making in one language or another. She states:

Deaf students need to do writing through English and reading through English. But, without a doubt, ASL interpretation needs to be recruited to make written English meaningful [...] Teachers would fare much better taking courses in the teaching of writing and reading rather than those that compare the grammar of ASL and of English. (12)

Livingston's practice leans heavily into the well-recognized concept that students need to be able to convey ideas clearly before learning how English and ASL differ. Once their content is clearly conveyed, students may benefit from learning how linguistics works between two languages to understand linguistic functions of written English, as the practice supports knowledge transfer between the two languages. For students at the postsecondary level, their primary concern is the development and conveyance of content in a clear manner to a specific audience, thus demonstrating a deeper understanding of the content at hand as a result of engaging with the writing process.



## College-level Advocacy and Support for the d/Deaf

Throughout history, most d/Deaf individuals have had little to no experience advocating for themselves, or they have had no d/Deaf models to learn from to advocate for themselves, especially in academic settings. In rare cases, a d/Deaf student may have received self-advocacy training, but it is not commonly found in secondary education settings. A student's inability to advocate for themselves may be due to a lack of knowledge of what accommodations are available, a lack of comfortability being assertive for their needs, or a lack of knowledge of what accommodations best support their learning. These factors are all influenced by the way that the student is supported in their K-12 settings, as generally primary and secondary education administrators decide what accommodations the student will have in those settings (Cawthon et al.).

Even today in modern primary and secondary classrooms, there are larger tendencies for d/Deaf students to be placed into situations that limit their learning abilities and sometimes result in court cases. According to Phil Ferolito of the *Yakima-Herald*, a local paper in Yakima, WA, a culturally Deaf student from the Grandview School District received a \$1 million court settlement in 2015 because his school district had placed him into a Special Needs classroom and did not allow for him to graduate within a 4-year timeframe because of academic delay. Instead of providing supportive services for the student, the school had decided to provide the student academic material intended for lower grade levels (Ferolito). In these cases, the segregation of d/Deaf students from their hearing peers reinforces the stigmas historically associated with deafness, such as not being able to achieve high academic success. In doing so, this

practice leads to these students not receiving the necessary support and experiences that would contribute to their academic success.

To provide equal opportunities for students with disabilities, all universities provide a form of support to their students with disabilities as mandated by federal regulations. In accordance with Sections II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, each postsecondary campus offers accommodations for students with disabilities in the classroom environment to establish equal opportunity for them to learn, including the provision of interpreters, note-takers, assistive technologies, and other services such as lengthened time for exams (Americans with Disabilities Act Title II Regulations; Americans with Disabilities Act Title III Regulations; U.S. Department of Labor). For students in primary and secondary education, accommodations are set and provided by the school per the U.S. Department of Education's Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). However, in postsecondary settings, students must learn to advocate for themselves and learn about what services a university has, which can be difficult to navigate. Stephanie L.

Kerschbaum et al. acknowledge:

Much of what currently exists regarding disability and higher education does not engage multiple higher education constituencies. Instead, pockets of disability knowledge are tucked away in different places on different campuses and, sometimes, in different places on the same campus for different groups. (2)

In this complexity, the support provided to students with disabilities varies campus to campus, and the ability to advocate for one's self may become challenging for the student if they are unsure of where to receive the support that they need.

The dynamic between students, interpreters, and instructors also greatly impacts the way that a student is supported, as Sigrid Slettebakk Berge and Gøril Thomassen note in their study of Norwegian high school students interacting with interpreters and educators.

They state:

One of the main topics in inclusive education is where teachers and interpreters should draw the line between their mutual and private responsibilities. The interpreter can help the teacher and the hearing students to remember to wait for the processing of information, and the deaf student can also demand more visual modifications, but the teacher is the one who has the authority to adjust the discourse patterns to accommodate interpreting. (189)

Because the teacher maintains the course content and manages its broadcasting to the classroom, they maintain primary control of how content is distributed to the class.

However, when supported by a qualified interpreter, their work is streamlined into concise support for their students. Through discussion and negotiation, educators, students, and interpreters alike are able to work together to support the student's education.

At the university where I conducted my research, disability services for d/Deaf students are all located in one office that is designed to support all students who need additional educational accommodations, services, and/or supports. The office provides interpreters, notetakers, and other such accommodations to students with documented disabilities. However, students must follow the office's procedures to receive proper services, which takes time. To acquire accommodations, a student must notify the office and submit documentation that provides an accurate diagnosis, which supports their request for such services. The office then evaluates the information provided and collaborates with the student's school or program to ensure that their accommodation

needs are met. Because of the time that this process takes, d/Deaf students are urged to register as soon as possible with the office to receive the support services they need.

### *Self-Advocacy of d/Deaf Students*

With self-advocacy comes an awareness of what events need to take place in order for d/Deaf students to receive the support that they need. At the postsecondary level, d/Deaf students need to disclose their deafness, but how they disclose such information impacts the way that they may be viewed and/or treated. Kerschbaum et al. recognize disability disclosure as “not a singular event, not a one-and-for-all action but, rather, an ongoing process of continuously, in a variety of settings and contexts, performing and negotiating disability awareness and perceptibility” (1). Students must disclose their disability to many people when they arrive at college, including (but not limited to) each educator they work with, the disability support office(s) on campus, and academic advisors. With each meeting, the student must acknowledge and address the support needed, and they must strive to advocate for themselves.

Tawny Holmes, an education lawyer and current Undergraduate Programs Coordinator for the Department of ASL and Deaf Studies at Gallaudet University, describes her experience of navigating university support during her time in law school. She learned to be proactive and assertive to gain the support and access that she needed, and also was very well-knowledgeable about the ADA, which she advises those who use those services to be “well-versed” in. She states:

It is important for the students to be clear and consistent when making accommodation requests. It is necessary to be pleasant but firm when discussing the issues and concerns with college personnel. It’s always helpful to communicate in advance what the needs are. Ultimately, it is the

college's responsibility to provide *all* students with opportunities to benefit from the college life.

During her time in law school, Holmes frequently needed to advocate for her right to have interpreters who could sufficiently support her communication throughout her time in the program. She interviewed multiple interpreters in order to find those who would be able to support her specific language needs as they related to the law program, and she frequently would connect with the campus Disability Services Office to self-advocate for proper accommodations. Such accommodations requested and achieved including having two interpreters present during her classes, which typically were 2-3 hours in length. In addition to having the interpreter present provide a brief description of standard practice for interpreters, Holmes also described the interpreting and translation process. She explained to the administrators that the work would result in poor communication and limited access to the provided information.

Frequently, Holmes would connect with the assistant dean of the school, who would instruct the Disability Services Office to provide adequate interpreter support. Such processes are often necessary for d/Deaf students to achieve quality support from interpreters. Holmes notes that to manage the semester, it is important for d/Deaf students to meet with key administrators, which may include an associate dean or department chair along with a Disability Services Office coordinator, before the beginning of the semester to develop a plan of how services will be provided.

## *Identity with Disability*

The support of d/Deaf students under federal regulations uses a pathological view of deafness rather than identifying d/Deaf people as part of a linguistic or cultural minority group. Under such a lens, d/Deaf students are often labeled as “disabled” by the university when they request additional services, and in such a manner, the university identifies the students as those who are unable to access communication. The discussion of identity and disability has deep-seated roots entwined with oppression in the Deaf community, and still has relevance to them today because of how the terms historically have been used, and how the terms are used to identify diagnosis. Brenda Jo Brueggemann, a professor of English at the University of Connecticut, reflects on the relationship between the terms “deaf” and “disabled”:

My point is that, in the commonplace book of “deafness,” things are not always clearly or singularly defined, designated, determined as “just” or “pure” or “only” deafness. And, however much some deaf people may want to resist being labeled “disabled,” the fact remains that they are often labeled as such and that these labels—in all cases—are not always accurate, though they may be, as it were, with consequences. [...] I suggest that to resist and distance one’s self-identity and group-identity from those whose condition has been deemed (for better or worse, for right or wrong) affiliated with hearing loss would also in essence, do further violence to those others with whom “authorities” have placed us (deaf people) in categorical similarity. Who—or what—are deaf people so afraid of when they resist placement in the commonplace of “disability”? (12)

The way that the term *disabled* is used is important to identify how d/Deaf students receive support. In order for a university or school system to receive funding through ADA regulations or IDEA for their Disability Services office, and for an individual to receive support for such services, a formal diagnosis must be provided by the student or their parent/guardian that states that the school needs to provide additional services for

the student to be able to succeed alongside their peers. However, while understanding the regulations presented by IDEA, a basic understanding of Deaf culture shows that the Deaf community recognizes themselves as a community that has a language and is able to complete the same tasks as hearing individuals. In this light, the Deaf community views hearing people who do not understand sign language as “disabled” in that hearing individuals are unable to access the Deaf community because they are unable to understand the preferred manual communication of its community members.

### Interpreter Support

Quality sign language interpreters maintain a variety of roles when working with d/Deaf individuals, and thus have a significant impact on the quality of support that a d/Deaf student receives. The National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes describes these roles in their “Sign Language Interpreters: An Introduction” tip sheet, which details the role and expectations of a qualified interpreter:

They must understand the meanings and intentions expressed in one language and express those meanings and intentions in the other language. Interpreters must be able to retain information and manage the flow of the communication, most often in real time (simultaneously). They must understand and manage the cultural nuances of the environment and follow professional and ethical standards set by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). (2)

Although the ADA states that interpreters must be provided to students, the description for interpreters remains vague. As presented by the National Deaf Center of Postsecondary Outcomes in their “Hiring Qualified Sign Language Interpreters” tip sheet, the ADA describes qualified interpretation this way: “interpret effectively, accurately, and impartially, both receptively and expressively, using any necessary specialized

vocabulary” (1). They continue, stating “What is ‘effective’ is determined by the d/Deaf individual. ADA does not mandate certification; however, it is a strong benchmark for determining qualification” (1). When Holmes began her first classes in law school, she encountered multiple occasions where she would need to request different interpreters who would better support her understanding of legal information. She states:

I realized that not only did I have to steel myself for the first-year barrage of Socratic dialogue, the foreign language of law, and prepare for the unusual approach that my grades would be decided almost entirely by my performance on the final exam, but I also had to make sure the interpreters hired by the law school would not hinder me from surviving the program.

Because there is no federal guideline that explicitly defines interpreter quality, some states have chosen to develop state regulations to help manage quality, but many leave those discussions to consumers and providers of such services. The state of Indiana does not maintain any regulations or licensure laws for interpreter quality.

In addition to these legal complications, interpreters generally work in settings where it is difficult for most people to be able to discern good from bad interpreting, as most people do not understand ASL, nor do they understand how to gauge an interpreter’s skills. In order to acquire the specific services that she needed for law school, Holmes took it upon herself to interview interpreters who would be working with her before the semester began. She notes:

It is often necessary to interview the interpreters to determine whether or not the person is capable of providing complete access. It is critical to note that the Disability Services Office personnel are not qualified nor are they in a position to determine the competence of service providers such as interpreters. Furthermore, holding a professional certification, such as those issued by the Registry for Interpreters for the Deaf, is no guarantee that the interpreter is capable of working in a highly specialized academic environment such as law.



When preparing to work with a d/Deaf student, the interpreter should have prior knowledge of the course content. According to the Registry for Interpreters of the Deaf Professional Standards Committee:

An interpreter's work begins before arriving at the job site. The interpreter must become familiar with the subject matter that the speakers will discuss; a task that may involve research on topic-related words and phrases that may be used from both languages. [...] While interpreters may not completely specialize in a particular field or industry, many do focus on one area of expertise such as business, law, medicine or education. (1)

By becoming acquainted with the content beforehand, an interpreter can provide their students a fully confident understanding of the material and content provided, leading to a successful experience for all parties involved. In Holmes' case, the interpreters were interviewed so that she could assess the competency of those interpreters in situations where legal terms would frequently need to be translated, and so that she could ensure a best fit for her needs. According to the National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes, in order for interpreters to best accommodate their students, a textbook should be provided for the interpreter, and the interpreter should have access to all online materials the class uses, including being part of the course's management system (i.e. Canvas or BlackBoard) so that they can access course materials as well. They note that an interpreter may also request lecture notes and any additional relevant materials before the beginning of the class ("Sign Language Interpreters in the Classroom").

Holmes also notes that in specific fields, ASL terms are not always readily available or are limited, and that solutions for overcoming such obstacles depend on what the student prefers, e.g., the use of fingerspelling. Holmes instead would suggest the use of movement as a temporary sign in ASL grammar, while the second interpreter present

would write out the term described for later reference as well as important dates and page numbers. She states, “This was necessary as it was practically impossible for me to keep my eyes focused on the first interpreter while she furiously interpreted the rapid-fire lecture of the professor, write notes, and keep up with everything that was going on.”

### *Unqualified Interpreters*

In cases where unqualified interpreters work with d/Deaf people, the d/Deaf participants quickly fall behind in discussion. Gary L. Long and Donald H. Beil, who conducted qualitative and quantitative studies at the National Technical Institute of the Deaf with d/Deaf<sup>4</sup> and hard-of-hearing professionals, found that d/Deaf participants often did not join hearing-based classroom discussions because of the difficulties presented by interpretation lag and their inability to identify who has spoken during the discussion. Long and Beil explain:

There is always lag time between what is spoken and what is interpreted to a deaf or hard-of-hearing individual. If the deaf or hard-of-hearing person has a question about the message, he or she must stop the interpreter, who continues to receive and interpret additional information, ask his or her question, and then watch as the answer goes back through the same route. This can be disruptive and can frequently leave all parties frustrated. (6)

Long and Beil recognize d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing students are denied fluid access to communication with teachers and peers, they ask fewer questions, do not feel confident about their understanding of the material, and do not feel a part of the class setting. Thus, the communication barrier that exists with indirect instruction can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness on the part of these students (10). In turn, this may negatively

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<sup>4</sup> The National Technical Institute of the Deaf is one of nine colleges at the Rochester Institute of Technology, and it is the world’s first technical college of Deaf and Hard of Hearing students, with a student body consisting of both hearing and d/Deaf students.

affect d/Deaf students' performance and understanding of the course material as the semester continues, resulting in the student performing poorly overall.

Interpretation processing time—the time required for interpreters to listen, interpret, and sign the necessary information—is always present, regardless of the interpreter's skill or amount of experience with the course lecture and/or material involved. However, qualified interpreters easily mitigate this, as their training prepares them to mediate conversation for smooth, efficient translation.

Long and Beil asked for participants in their study to reflect on past experiences with hearing professional development workshops in comparison to theirs, in which ASL was the primary language used rather than English. Multiple participants identified that past experiences with interpreters left them feeling unable to fully understand the material or unable to ask questions. One participant stated, “with a hearing class, if I have a question, I don't know if somebody else has asked about it. I feel stupid if I have asked the same question. Hey, we already asked that! I feel like I am going to just kind of look stupid or a little bit embarrassed” (qtd. in Long and Beil 8). Qualified interpreters are fully capable of supporting d/Deaf students to ensure that they understand what is occurring in the classroom and clearly mediate the conversation so that the students can join conversations.

### Classroom Structure

Educators tend to structure their classes in accordance with what their style of teaching is, which may be fluid facilitation, traditional lecture, or a mixture of these two. While they are not able to fully control the space that the class inhabits, they adjust the

classroom to accommodate students as they develop their work. One such common way is for all members to move their seating so that they can see everyone and maintain a proper sightline with their instructor and whoever is speaking. Julia A. Smith conducted a study on her campus that assessed educators' current support of d/Deaf students. One participant in Smith's study commented, "'I wish teachers would slow things down in class. It gets confusing to see who is talking and I sometimes get lost. Maybe students should sit in a [semi-] circle. That would be more *deaf-friendly*'" (qtd. in J. A. Smith 31). By sitting where everyone can see each other, students not only are more likely to interact with each other throughout their time together, but they are also able to connect with members of the group who may not be able to easily access the conversation in other settings.

When d/Deaf students attempt to take notes during discussions, they tend to miss much of the content that is discussed around the room by their teacher and/or hearing classmates, as they are looking at their notebooks to jot down information instead of watching their interpreter, or they are looking around the room to see who speaks instead of giving full attention to the information their interpreter is translating. If permitted by the university, these students are provided a note-taker; however, the note-taker may be a fellow student. According to J. A. Smith, these notes may be sloppy or arrive late to the student (14). At the university where I conducted my research, if a d/Deaf student is registered with the campus's accommodation's office, they may request a note-taker for each class. Their classmates are then notified via email by the office with the note-taking work as a work-study position that they would be paid for. Interested classmates then

provide an example of their notes to the accommodation's office, which then selects one individual for the position per class.

Some d/Deaf students may still want to take their own notes as well. However, the students must pay attention to the presentation, interpreter, their notes, and any other visual items that are being presented or discussed. One of J. A. Smith's participants noted:

PowerPoint presentations are especially helpful to me as a deaf student. Because if you are in class and just sit and watch the interpreter and try to take notes, all at the same time, then you just get lost and miss things. It is better if the key points or an outline is up on the board. That helps me so much because I am a visual person. (27)

By providing an outline and access to materials outside of class in accessible formats, the students can then review the course material and prepare for the lecture or review what has been previously discussed in class. In addition to supporting these d/Deaf students, the provision of class materials in multiple, accessible formats is also great for all members of the class to support their learning processes.

### *Use of Universal Design, Active Learning Design, and Technology*

To support classroom pedagogies, Universal Design (UD)<sup>5</sup>, Active Learning Design (ALD)<sup>6</sup>, and Active Learning Technologies<sup>7</sup> are commonly used in classrooms to develop inclusive environments that support student engagement and learning. Such pedagogies address the curriculum design and the classroom's structure and function to

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<sup>5</sup> Also known as Universal Design in Learning (UDL)

<sup>6</sup> Active Learning consists of "activities that students do to construct knowledge and understanding. The activities vary but require students to do higher order thinking. Although not always explicitly noted, metacognition—students' thinking about their own learning—is an important element, providing the link between activity and learning" (Brame).

<sup>7</sup> Technologies that are designed and utilized to support Active Learning Design methodologies

better serve all students' needs. Such pedagogies aim to provide students a variety of methods and tools to use during class to support success.

Patricia A. Dunn and Kathleen Dun de Mers note that Universal Design is derived from disability studies to create inclusive environments. They note: "The difference between assistive technology and Universal Design is that the former focuses on an individual adapting to a rigid curriculum, while the latter focuses on curriculum designed from its inception to be flexible and inclusive" (qtd. in Mutnick and Lamos 31).

Universal Design is a useful methodology for creating flexible, accessible materials that all students can use to successfully achieve course goals. According to Luckner, UD supports the use of a variety of methods for content, demonstration, and interest development (52). These methods are intentionally flexible for accessibility; for instance, by offering materials in a variety of formats in which materials can be accessed, such as in electronic and physical forms, a student can then decide which format they prefer. The practices of UDL have been popular in educational settings and have become prominent in English classrooms, where students are encouraged to collaborate with their peers and practice research using a variety of physical and electronic resources. One such example is to provide the option of writing a formal essay or to create a podcast transcript; both require for the student to practice the skills acquired in the class, but the students are able to approach the practice of these skills in different mediums.

Most importantly, UDL supports each student's progress individually, and creates a consistent dialogue between the educator and each student through the form of feedback. Students might be asked to individually assess themselves throughout the semester to see where they are excelling and where they are struggling with the

information and skills being discussed and used. Educators are then able to adjust each student's goals towards where they need to develop further. In the writing classroom, one such form of feedback is for writers to create an Author's Statement to provide as the first page of their project to provide them an opportunity to present where they see themselves succeeding and where they think they need additional work.

Currently, there is discussion of the use of active learning strategies to support d/Deaf students in the classroom. There is a wide host of resources available for ALD overall, including *Active Learning in Higher Education*. Also, the discussion of using active learning strategies to support d/Deaf students in the classroom is developing (Belcastro; Cawthon et. al.). In recent years, ALD has begun to be popularly used in the development of pedagogies and classroom design both in K-12 and post-secondary settings. These design practices are implemented into classrooms by filling them with additional technologies and designing the room's furniture so that the classroom focus is no longer on one PowerPoint Screen or board. The focus then centers on the students' positions within the room and how they move through and/or use the space to support their learning capabilities.

Although there is discussion that supports the integration of Active Learning Technologies into mainstream classrooms at the college level, such as setting up television screens around the room or adding whiteboard access to each table or group of tables into classroom design, there are also potential setbacks that can result from the use of added technologies. These potential setbacks, such as students and/or educators becoming overwhelmed by the abundance of technologies at hand and reduced or stretched sightlines between the educator and their students, further complicate the

learning process and communication access that students have, regardless of their academic and/or social backgrounds. The presence of a variety of technologies around the room support active visual interactions with course materials, but the presence of additional visuals may not always be supportive for d/Deaf students. A study by Marc Marschark et al. shows that the productivity of visual practices for a d/Deaf student depends upon the student's range of hearing loss. While some students may not need as much additional technology for communication and understanding, others may require such support.

#### The First Year Composition Course

For many public universities, the First Year Composition (FYC) Course is intended to be open for all undergraduate students as a gateway course for developing writing practices that will support their writing tasks in the future. Most FYC courses remain listed as a general requirement for all undergraduate students to complete, and in such manner, all incoming undergraduate students who have either not tested out or not completed this requirement through dual-credit courses are required to take the course. The FYC course that I observed and taught is maintained as one of the general education core courses for written communication and aligns with the Statewide Transfer General Education Core requirements. The course supports student development in writing and critical thinking over the course of a standard 16-week semester. Educators lead students to complete the course by offering a variety of tools and skills that the students can use throughout the remainder of their academic years and in their professional careers.



The course is designed so that students focus on the continued development of their writing by working on three or four major writing projects over the course of the semester. Students choose two of these projects to include in a portfolio that is submitted for evaluation at the end of the semester, a portfolio that includes final drafts, an author's note that describes how they have revised their selected pieces, and a reflection essay that describes their advances on each of the course's learning outcomes over the course of the semester. The reflection essay also offers insight into how they view their experience in the class. Some instructors ask to see their past drafts and any peer-review work as well. Thus, rather than focus solely on the completion of a writing assignment, it is expected for students to produce and develop effective writing processes. In working on such writing, students gain experience responding to a variety of rhetorical situations, and their portfolios reflect the student's writing abilities with their writing and a critical self-evaluation of how they think they have done.

Throughout the course, students are expected to support each other's learning via direct communication in open classroom discourse—where a topic is discussed openly among all participants—and in small group work, where students may either be partnered with another student or grouped with multiple peers. In fact, lecture is not preferred as a primary method of instruction (although lecture can be used to supplement if needed), as noted in the curriculum guide. Rather, students are encouraged to use questions to work through common reading and writing-related challenges. Students can then use these developed questions to explore ideas and concepts that support them in their writing processes.

Within this process of developing and using questions, students develop their skills primarily in small and large groups by discussing and generating ideas. Students then use the content created within the group to expand their knowledge of and responses to discussed topics and ideas. This workshop approach to writing development allows for students to recognize and write for an audience other than their professor. They also develop their own styles and voices in writing as they refer to each other's drafts as examples and learn to assess each other's work.

One of the primary goals of the FYC course is to develop critical thinking surrounding topics that the students want to explore. By leaving the range of potential topics open to the students, they are much more likely to develop an understanding of how writing works in relation to topics that they are sincerely interested in. For students who are uncertain of their writing skills, the stakes that they face when developing writing are significantly lowered, as they discuss topics that they likely know quite a bit about. In addition, the portfolio method does not force a high level of competence with each production of writing. Instead, the students' writing is recognized as something that can be developed until a reasonable level of competence is attained. From this point of comfortability, they are then able to focus on improving both their knowledge and their skill of written communication.

In most writing scenarios, students are writing in response to texts that the class has read, and thus they develop reading and analytical skills through group discussion in addition to their writing about major themes and topics provided to them. Such development and collaboration allows for the students to develop what they want to say and how they might state it effectively to their intended audience.

### *Supporting Marginalized Identities in the Writing Classroom*

In recent years, the concept of inclusive pedagogies has greatly begun to inform teaching practices. Such pedagogies recognize students' backgrounds directly impact their academic success and support the discussion of diversity and social justice themes to address narratives of difference. Ann George describes this focus in her discussion of critical pedagogies: "The aim, then, of mainstream critical pedagogies is to revitalize students' conceptions of freedom and inspire them to collectively recreate a society built on democratic values and respect for difference" (80). By re-framing the classroom to not only focus on mainstream, middle class students but address all students of various differences, educators can then begin to adjust their teaching practices to recognize each of their students' backgrounds and situations.

Many scholars of Writing and Rhetoric study critical pedagogies, which "envision a society not simply pledged to, but successfully enacting, the principles of freedom and social justice" (George 77). Such methods are now found in many educational practices because of the use of such pedagogies in critical thinking, especially in the Liberal Arts. But how do college educators, who are predominantly hearing, use these pedagogies when interacting with d/Deaf students, who have historically been victimized by hearing people, to create a more productive writing classroom? Before the educator meets their student, they recognize the discourse that will take place will be different and visibly noticeable. Their discourse may also be influenced by the presence of interpretation in the room. Regardless, if an educator's practices are influenced by the presence of members of oppressed communities, are they influenced to change or adjust their practices, and what would those changes look like? Critical pedagogies, though implemented with good

intentions, may accidentally become obstructive when empowering those of oppressed communities, or “outsiders.” C. H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon ask in their reflection on such goals, “Who is to be liberated from what? Who gets to do the liberating? [...] Is the goal to make the outsider into an insider?” (qtd. in George 87). With these questions in mind, what does inclusion look like for accurately and reasonably supporting these students? What background knowledge do educators need to have before stepping into the classroom with these students?

### **Chapter Three: Understanding Support of d/Deaf Writers in Mainstream First Year Composition Classrooms**

As indicated in Chapter 1, I conducted an unfunded qualitative research study at a regionally accredited university in order to gain accurate, current knowledge of how deaf students are supported in mainstream FYC classrooms that supports bridging the gap in current literature regarding the support of deaf students. This study also provides insight as to what communication practices used with d/Deaf students best support their learning in the writing classroom. First, I interviewed two culturally Deaf students about their experiences in the FYC classroom, one an alumna of an out-of-state university where she had taken the course, the other a current student at the university where this study took place. I then interviewed three college instructors about their experiences teaching d/Deaf students at this university. Lastly, I interviewed a nationally certified interpreter of the d/Deaf who is the current director of the university's ASL interpreting program.

#### **Culturally Deaf Students' Perspectives**

When I requested the participation of the two culturally Deaf individuals who I was introduced to, I was intrigued by their initial questions about my study. Although they were interested in providing me insight to how d/Deaf students are supported in college classrooms, they showed more concern for young d/Deaf students in K-12 systems. Deaf students in mainstream K-12 settings typically face many academic obstacles resulting from language deprivation that they must overcome in short amounts of time to catch up to their hearing peers and become college ready. Both participants referred to the common statistic that d/Deaf people only achieve up to a fourth-grade

reading level and noted that more discussion needs to be developed regarding students' language deprivation in K-12 education, as such factors directly impact how d/Deaf students are supported in mainstream education.

### *Student 1's Experience*

The first student who I interviewed (henceforth referred to as Student 1) is a Caucasian woman in her early 30's who identifies as culturally Deaf and who has always used ASL as her primary language of communication. Student 1, who is not enrolled at the university where I conducted my study, was chosen because of her willingness to be interviewed. She is an alumna of an out-of-state university and had taken FYC in the early 2000's at that school and her perspective allows us to confirm the experiences that d/Deaf students may face in FYC classrooms and compare it with the person interviewed at the university where this study was conducted. It is important to recognize that this other university's writing program uses its own curriculum that may or may not be similar to the writing program where this study took place. However, this student was able to offer her communication experience in that classroom, which benefits the discussion of how to approach supporting d/Deaf students in writing classrooms overall. For many d/Deaf students, their view of classroom interaction is much different than many of their hearing peers because of their past experiences, and the inclusion of Student 1's experiences helps develop an understanding of how such past experiences may inform d/Deaf students' experiences in the FYC classroom. Although I had intended to focus on FYC courses, Student 1 brought up her own past experiences with hearing

peers in mainstream schools, which helped to inform how she approached her mainstream college courses.

Student 1 said that overall she had had a positive experience in the composition class. The instructor was nice, and Student 1 primarily worked with two other students who were also d/Deaf. The only issues Student 1 perceived were related to interpreter support. One issue was that there was only one interpreter available for all three d/Deaf students. Student 1 stated: “It [partnering with other hearing students] was hard for the interpreter; there was only one interpreter who would need to go back and forth, so we usually were our own group for that reason”. Although the three d/Deaf students were able to work together throughout the semester, their inability to work with other groups led to them being unable to collaborate with others in the same manner that their hearing classmates could.

Student 1 also noted not knowing who was speaking at any one moment led to confusion: there were 30 students in the class and the student couldn’t turn and see who spoke without missing information that her interpreter continued to interpret in front of her. The interpreter would sign “they said” or “girl said,” but never specifically identified who. During class discussions, the interpreter had difficulty receiving and giving information to Student 1. Such practices of mediating conversations are known as turn-taking<sup>8</sup>, which is one of the most influential factors to classroom communication.

During Student 1’s elementary years, she attended a private school, where she faced difficulty being respected by hearing peers and adults because of her deafness. She

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<sup>8</sup> Turn-taking is the act of pausing for another individual to speak in a conversation or discussion; signals such as auditory pause, raising hands, and gestures influence the way that turn-taking continues in a conversation.

stated that during summer school she faced issues of bullying from peers, which led to her accepting and preferring isolation from these peers.

I think my teacher was snobby. She didn't understand my feelings, and elementary kids are mean. 'Ha ha, you sign, ha ha.' [...] But sometimes [it's] hard for [deaf kids] in mainstream school; some kids are mean. Some kids are mean but not clear, laugh, claim want to be friends, then run away and laugh [to their friends] 'she thinks I'm her friend.' I see the colors clearly. I know when kids lie.

Because of the treatment that Student 1 received, she learned not to trust her hearing classmates. Instead, she learned to focus on the assignments provided and maintained communication in a professional sense rather than developing relationships with her peers. Although Student 1 was indeed isolated from her peers, she had become accustomed to and preferred this.

I knew not to make friends with them [my classmates] because of their perspectives towards me. I sign, I need to work harder, I have an interpreter with me, so I am fine on my own. If they want to **meet** me, I'll talk, but I already have Deaf friends; it's why in the afternoons I went to the Deaf school, I didn't need an interpreter [there].

### *Student 2's Experience*

Student 2 is a Caucasian woman in her mid 20's who identifies as culturally Deaf and uses ASL as her primary form of communication. During her primary education, Student 2 attended an oralist school. When I asked Student 2 what her primary language is, she said that when she was growing up, she read English as her first language, then learned ASL later at Gallaudet University.

In great contrast to Student 1's FYC experience, Student 2's experience with hearing peers in the FYC classroom was much more interactive both in small and large group settings. Student 2 was the only d/Deaf student in her class, but she felt included in



the classroom discourse. When I asked Student 2 what her best experience in the FYC classroom was, she identified that for her it was learning about varieties of English and differences in the English language. Student 2's professor recognized and presented varieties of English to validate their experiences alongside each other. The professor did not request for members of any specific culture to address their writing, but instead chose a variety of authors, who each represented a culture and type of English. Each piece was provided to the students alongside the authors' backgrounds. Such practices were used to recognize and validate non-standard variants of English and to support the students' thinking about variants of English in their writing. Student 2 explains:

We read different forms of English, different cultures' English, so it gave me the opportunity to show my culture's English. [...] It was my first time analyzing English, so that made me analyze more of my own, so I like how he teaches that. In [his] class I liked how he discussed English and Sign and how he addressed other cultures too to show variants of English.

Student 2 reported that her experience led her to her own inquiry of where she was in her writing development and how to improve from that point. She noted that this experience also allowed for her and her classmates to develop their own writing identities by using their personal, cultural identities to inform their writing practices and techniques. Rather than displaying the varied Englishes of students' cultures as Other or illegitimate, the professor used them to teach them. The professor supported the application of stylistic practices demonstrated in these English variants to student writing as a starting point from which the writers could further develop their skills. Student 2 felt reviewing these stylistic practices greatly supported her analysis of her writing and helped her gauge her progress through the course.

### *A Need for Improvement?*

During my interviews with Student 1 and Student 2, I asked what they thought educators could improve on when working with d/Deaf students in the writing classroom. One of the primary concerns that Student 1 addressed is an issue recognized by various scholars (i.e. J. A. Smith): educators tend to pace in front of the interpreter. She asserted:

When an Interpreter is there, the professor can't be moving back and forth in front of the interpreter; teachers need to stay in one place. The interpreter sits in front of me, so when teachers are presenting a movie or a lab activity, they need to chat with the student and interpreter depending on the situation. Most of the time, the teacher is fine and accepts, respecting the students.

In order to maintain concise, clear communication and understanding, the educator must refer to the student and interpreter to identify where the instructor would best be located in relation to them. This discussion should take place before the beginning of class.

While Student 2 greatly appreciated the support that she received, the student found sharing her own writing to be a challenge to be overcome. She explained:

I wasn't comfortable sharing my paper with my peers, I wouldn't call it a bad experience, I was just uncomfortable. [...] In sharing my work it's not really my decision, if other students do that, I need to do it too.

When integrating d/Deaf students into groups, it is okay to have them navigate uncomfortable situations alongside their peers. Student 2 noted that potentially she might have been more comfortable if she had remained in one group throughout the semester, but also commented, "Maybe I would be more comfortable if they recognized that I'm learning English as a second language."

In addition to promoting the discussion of variants of English, Student 2 offered insightful questions for consideration to what would be useful when working with diverse students: "Ask them [to write a response to] 'What's your identity? What does English

mean to you?’ then have them read and analyze what they just wrote.” The process this student provides shows reflection of identity. In this process of reflection, there is also the development of pride in one’s own identity, which contributes to the student’s confidence in their writing development. Student 2’s FYC instructor allowed for them to expand their knowledge of writing techniques without setting aside their identity as many d/Deaf students are forced to do in their early writing development.

### Instructors’ Perspectives

Most d/Deaf students who attend the university where I conducted my study as undergraduates take FYC, but the enrollment of these students at any given time is slim, thus resulting in a small pool of instructors who have taught d/Deaf students in that specific environment. Upon reaching out to instructors to interview, only a handful confirmed that they had worked with d/Deaf students in the past and would be interested in being interviewed. I interviewed three instructors, hereby noted as Instructor 1, Instructor 2, and Instructor 3. All participating instructors currently work at the university where I conducted my study, and all confirmed that when they first were introduced to teaching d/Deaf students, they were unsure of how to approach supporting them. However, since gaining experience teaching and communicating with multiple students of this demographic in the classroom setting, they have each developed skills and approaches that support d/Deaf students’ learning in the writing classroom.

In each interview, I began my inquiry by asking about when the instructors began working with d/Deaf students and what their first interactions were like. Each of these instructors began working with d/Deaf students around the time that d/Deaf students were

beginning to be integrated into mainstream classrooms—around the mid ‘90’s/early 2000’s. Instructor 1 is a Caucasian man who has only taught two d/Deaf students at the university, both during the early 2000’s in regular semester courses. Instructor 2 is a Caucasian woman who has also taught only two d/Deaf students at the university in the ‘90’s in regular semester courses. Instructor 3 is a Caucasian man who has taught quite a few d/Deaf students at other universities in addition to the university where this study was held. His first experience teaching d/Deaf students at the university where I conducted this study was in the mid ‘90’s; one experience was during a summer course.

### *Recognition of a Communication Shift*

I asked each instructor about their first interactions with d/Deaf students in the classroom setting. Instructor 2’s first experience of working with d/Deaf students came as a surprise when she was approached by an administrator who asked if she would accept a d/Deaf student into her class. She found that many instructors were uncomfortable, but she was excited. Before the student arrived in her class, she educated herself on Deaf culture. She noted how her self-education impacted the way that she interacted with the student:

I was saying things like “hearing impaired” and a lot of other inappropriate things. [It’s] necessary to become educated as far as speaking, you know, to the person instead of the interpreter. And I know they can only get a few words from lip reading.

When reflecting on that experience, she commented that educating oneself on their students’ cultural backgrounds is “conscious, good teaching.” In this sense, Instructor 2 infers that good teaching requires the educator to create a welcoming environment through the language that they use with the student and with the student’s peers.

Instructor 3 also supported preparing for these students' communication needs because educators can then address accessibility as needed. He stated, "It's just the anticipation because there is a part of the room that is operating differently than the rest of the room. It's good to know that need." I asked Instructor 3 whether administrators had informed him beforehand, and he informed me that if there had been any notifications, they were minimal. He has also experienced cases where the student and interpreter didn't meet with him before the beginning of classes, causing him to be unable to prepare before the beginning of the semester.

In each interview, I discussed the impact that the change in communication had upon class discussions because of the specific communication activity occurring between the d/Deaf students, their interpreters, and the rest of the class. Instructor 3 commented on students wanting to know what is occurring in the translation process between ASL and English and how students should approach working with that process:

It's weird because on one hand, because of three people I want to acknowledge that situation and I want to recognize it at the beginning, but I also want to make sure that they get heard in the larger group. In small groups this isn't really a problem because translators are doing this work with other students, but I don't act out of the ordinary that this is happening.

Instructor 3's choice of not addressing the situation directly supported each student's individual voice and allowed for them to navigate their own processes of working with interpreters and their peers. This also allowed for the focus to support the course's goals of developing writing skills rather than studying the communication activities taking place.

While all participants noted a shift in the communication practices, Instructor 1 found that his recognition of the translation process impacted the way that he interacted with the student and the interpreter when he first began working with them. He reflected,

I was curious about them. I also was wondering about the relationship with the interpreter and communication—do I pay attention to the student? The Interpreter? [...] The interpreter had me look at the student. [...] The interpreter I think tried to emphasize just being natural in communication, but it was hard for me to be natural because of the communication taking place.

It is common for educators to display a heightened recognition of the communication relay that takes place, especially those who study the rhetoric of discourse. Instructor 1's interest stemmed from past courses he had taken during his graduate education, and it had expanded with the emphasis of the communication situation at hand. When I asked Instructor 1 about what he had learned from the overall experience, he acknowledged the impact that the communication process has on teaching writing:

I learned that the whole issue of communication situation was even more so emphasized. The course is about written communication, about being careful with words, aware of the rhetorical situation, so how you reach someone's interest. [...] Just overall [in] the communication situation it's interesting to think about what's happening in that situation, what's being communicated.

Although Instructor 1 noted that the communication situation was so apparent, he found no communication issues when communicating with the student, as he and the student would primarily use email to write back and forth. He also noted that when assigning group work, one of the hearing students would lead and moderate the group by checking with the d/Deaf student to make sure they understood everything before continuing. Instructor 1 was impressed by the way that the students supported each other to make sure that they each had equal access to the discussion taking place.

### *d/Deaf Students' Writing Development*

During Instructor 1's and Instructor 3's interviews, discussion of d/Deaf students' writing performance was discussed to varying lengths. Instructor 1 had noted the ELL/ESL markers that d/Deaf students tend to have in their writing, and Instructor 3 recognized his main challenges were in supporting his students' writing development. He reflected, "They had difficulty starting in processes, so things were sometimes a little late, and I didn't care that they turned in late." As Instructor 3 reflected on what he wished he had known about d/Deaf students, he also reflected on how d/Deaf students approach writing from an ESL/ELL perspective. He explained: "I wish I had known...that the needs of d/Deaf students often have to do with idiom more than with grammar, so writing is another language for d/Deaf students. I wish I had known more about how they go from grammar of ASL to the written word." Professor 3 also noted that the relationship between written English and Deaf language is "super specialized." "I feel like I got a feel for it, but it kind of felt like working with a Chinese student, you know?"

Instructor 3 noted that one of the best strategies for working with d/Deaf students is to not be afraid to discuss the differences between written English and their native language of ASL. When I asked him about best pedagogical strategies, he reflected on his work with the student from Gallaudet. "I asked him, 'Do you think you have a style when you sign?' and he said, 'Oh yeah; I know I sign differently, and I know I am who I am.'" Instructor 3 noted that d/Deaf students are very receptive to understanding similarities and differences in ASL and English, just as other students want to learn and understand differences in languages. For d/Deaf students, Instructor 3 notes to especially focus on

writers' development from everyday language to academic language. "Don't think because there isn't a spoken voice that there isn't a voice [...] The same need is there."

### *Interpreter Support from Instructors' Perspectives*

Both Instructor 2 and Instructor 3 commented heavily on the impact that an interpreter has on the communication between instructors and their students. When I asked Instructor 3 about what he had learned overall, he noted that the quality of the translator impacts much of how the interaction between the instructor and the student develops. He found that when students are confident in their interpreters' ability to translate, the students themselves are confident in the course work. "When a student trusts the quality of their translator, they're more likely to ask questions."

Instructor 1's commentary on interpreter support primarily focused on his confusion of whether to look at the interpreter and student. When I asked Instructor 3 about the best strategies to use with d/Deaf students, he stated that the first strategy to use is to not talk to the translator, but instead to talk to the student. However, he noted that it's important to not ignore the translator's presence, as they still play a role in the communication process at hand.

Instructor 2 also recognized the importance of looking at the student because of her own past experiences with nonnative speakers of English:

I grew up in a nonnative speaking household, and when my mother and I go out, people don't talk to her. She knows seven languages, but she has an accent, so they talk to me and I think that's disrespectful. I think the same for an interpreter, but again, I had that experience.

In Instructor 2's discussion of best practices, she noted the importance of allowing the interpreter to work, but she also commented on the added support that instructors can



give to their interpreters regarding language use for clear interpretation. Instructor 2 explained, “for example, if an interpreter doesn’t understand ‘heuristic,’ I’m explaining something that maybe all students don’t understand. So, it’s basically good teaching and [being] open to having someone mirror you”.

Instructor 3 supports ensuring that the interpreter clearly understands what is going on, but has faced challenges with interpreters in the past, noting that the first interpreter he had worked with wasn’t attentive and didn’t understand the content he was teaching. Since beginning working with d/Deaf students, he commented that he has worked with one pair of interpreters on multiple occasions, which has made the process of communication easier because he knows them better, and they know his teaching style.

Instructor 2 also noted that some instructors don’t want an interpreter in the room and prefer to move the d/Deaf student to a different classroom. She questions whether they would prefer it because of the impact a d/Deaf student may have on an educator’s classroom preferences:

I don’t think they want people observing their teaching. There’s always the language barrier that could be uncomfortable, but there also could be an insecurity about having someone observe them teach. I think it’s also an instructor’s willingness to approach what needs to happen or more pressure on their work.

### *Technological Support for d/Deaf Students*

Both Instructor 2 and Instructor 3 discussed the positive impact that technology had on d/Deaf students. While the first of Instructor 3’s two d/Deaf students that he worked with at the beginning of his teaching career at this university did not have additional technologies, his second had been awarded a scholarship that provided an abundance of technology support, including voice-to-text software. He noted that the

second student was able to engage much more with this technology and that he could tell they were using it to support their writing development.

Instructor 3 also commented on the efficiency that computer classrooms allow for communication. “It’s easier in a computer classroom because they have the machine to work on. It’s the moving from something like speech to text in a regular classroom [that’s challenging] because there’s a lot about voice and authority in that classroom as a writer.” When students actively work on their projects in computer classrooms, educators can work alongside their students to help them develop skills that they need to develop.

Instructor 2’s discussion of technology encompassed her practices of supporting all students. She explained her position on teaching with technology:

I would think you could do anything as long as you have the technology behind it to support what’s being done. All your students should have access to the same materials and get what they want. I’m a big believer of seeing what can be done; it’s not an option to not figure it out.

In addition to maintaining ADA compliancy for her students’ performance, Instructor 2 identified that she puts all of her work into multiple formats for accessibility and that closed captioning of videos is necessary. She stated that her practice is good teaching because of the benefits this poses for all students, not just her d/Deaf students. Each student can then refer to what is being discussed without constraint as the class continues.

### *Disconnecting from the Classroom*

Instructor 1 and Instructor 3 each discussed having d/Deaf students disconnect from the overall classroom. In Instructor 3’s case, his first student didn’t keep up with the required work and didn’t participate in class while his second succeeded and received a lot of support. Instructor 1 also noted that one of his d/Deaf students would disconnect,

but her performance in the class was different. Instructor 1 described his interactions with his student as a similar experience to working with online students.

She would come to class, and may have come as a courtesy and be there and participate, but there was a sense that she was using the class to understand what she needed to do to complete the work, not a place where she would truly shine as a person and as an intellect. Almost like a job—checking in and checking out. Not that anything was negative when her work wasn't strong. I pointed [the issue at hand] out, she accepted the feedback and agreed, but she defined the space in which she would operate.

By setting her own bounds, the d/Deaf student who Instructor 1 had worked with didn't use the class as an opportunity to develop cultural experiences with the language. Instead, she focused on accomplishing the course requirements to move on to other classes. When I asked what best supports d/Deaf students, Instructor 1 was clear about maintaining the student's position toward how they wanted to navigate the class.

I'm not sure what the conditions were in that class, and it sounds kind of sad, but my sense was there was no sense of opening how to make things better. It may be me misreading, but it was almost like the relationship was taken care of by recognizing how she wanted, and doing what I could do as an instructor to leave it up to her, to navigate how she would respond as long as she wasn't falling off a cliff without help. She was getting enough from me to do what she wanted to do, but it's not my place to make it better and [unintentionally] make problems.

Although the situation may seem unfortunate to educators who want to see their students thrive in the environment that is provided, recognition of how much a student intends to interact determines the amount of support. Instead of pressing to support the student and drawing attention to her, Instructor 1 instead responded to and supported her performance within the boundaries that she chose to work in. The student's behavior is affected by their individual goals that they intend to accomplish through the course.

## An Interpreter's Perspective

To further the discussion of how a professional, qualified interpreter can support a positive educational experience for d/Deaf students and writing instructors alike, I interviewed the director of the American Sign Language Interpreting Program at the university. The director is a Caucasian woman who has extensive experience interpreting for students in classroom settings. She was first introduced to interpreting for students in writing environments early on in her interpreting career in the late 1990's-early 2000's. Her primary experience was with writing center tutors, and she was at first uncomfortable determining how much to facilitate. She reflects,

There was a lot of the student signing "I don't understand, English I struggle with," and I would do that mediation [and explain to the consultant] that this is a second language; especially young d/Deaf students sometimes don't know that concept. So, I would have to culturally and linguistically mediate gaps between Writing Center staff and d/Deaf students. [...] They didn't understand ELL students and what that meant. They were young, so they kind of knew the concept, but not logistically what that means for a lot of students, the most common struggles. [...] I don't think the staff understood that, so their conversation seemed more or maybe a little patronizing. They were undergraduates, so I helped students after I would go with them to the Writing Center on pieces missed just because I felt there was a gap.

The director also noted that while many interpreters recognize a lot of communication gaps, most don't attempt to bridge them. Later in our interview, she acknowledged this navigation of the language gap to be most challenging, because she didn't want to overstep her bounds as an interpreter. She commented, "I would oftentimes do it; I never had formal training [for tutoring d/Deaf students]. I don't know what the philosophy was at the time; d/Deaf people would say it was okay, but hearing people would say no. But how do d/Deaf people learn if they don't know what to ask for?" Because of her

experiences of navigating the support of these students, the director promotes this philosophy of service in the ASL Interpreting program.

We teach that philosophy in the interpreting program—if the d/Deaf individual you’re interpreting for wants you to do something else, if you’re comfortable, if the trust factor is there, to do it. Because who else is going to do it? And it really benefits the interpreter as well as the student. You are learning to develop relationships with students at a different level with a different language, and that would be a way that the interpreter can develop that.

As interpreting students begin to practice their skills in real world settings, the development of relationships with d/Deaf students helps develop trust. The director hopes that through the development of these meaningful relationships, the program can begin to support the closure of this gap.

I then asked the director what her best strategies were when working with d/Deaf writers. After pausing to reflect for a moment, she stated that she would first note the historical bounds of learning English for d/Deaf people “has been a very negative, demeaning task.” She would then continue by showing the student—both in English and ASL, how a word or phrase conveys meaning. In this way, both languages would be displayed side-by-side without preference for one or the other. The director explained that this method “levels the playing field and English isn’t superior.” By offering the languages without preference, the director was able to offer information about the student’s language use in a non-traditional way that helps validate their native language of ASL while also achieving the task of learning how an aspect of the English language works.

The director also acknowledged the benefit of showing d/Deaf students that using other resources does not make them worse at writing than hearing peers: “It’s also good

to show that hearing people, when they write, they don't write perfectly either. It's not just d/Deaf people who work on writing. And I tell d/Deaf people that I did go to the Writing Center and I worked with a tutor to write as a linguist writes."

After reviewing the best strategies that she has used in the past with students, I asked the director what she would suggest to teachers of writing who are working with d/Deaf students. First and foremost, she commented on the necessity to recognize that English is not their first language and that English is phonetically based. She described to me attending a trip to Japan with a d/Deaf student and their class, and she told me that she watched a Chinese interpreter write with their d/Deaf students. She asked them whether they had any writing problems with their students, to which they replied, "No, we never have any problems, they understand just fine." The director explained to me that because written Chinese is conceptually based, as sign language is, the students were able to pick up writing much easier than students who learn phonetic languages. Students who learn languages that use concept-based systems, such as sign language and Chinese, are able to connect concepts between the two languages and then move toward developing fluency in that written language.

The director also commented on the importance of developing rapport with students before the class begins. She notes that although building rapport is a natural communication practice that instructors do naturally, the introduction of an interpreter changes their perceptions towards that communication to feel "distanced." To overcome this hurdle, the director encourages small talk about everyday activities, such as asking students what they do over the weekend and "making a human connection." She also

encourages instructors to reach out to students to ensure that they are fully supporting the student.

At the end of our interview, I commented that another interviewee had noted that they think instructors don't want interpreters in the room in fear of being observed and receiving judgement for their preferred teaching practices. The director laughed and responded,

Interpreters are so busy that by the next semester they won't remember what you did. I don't have time to sit and observe your teaching, there are too many other things to focus on. [...] I'm so busy working as an interpreter, I'm not going to be paying attention to that.

Because of the constant mediation of communication for d/Deaf students, interpreters' focuses are entirely on the support of that student, and intentionally remains in that state throughout their work so that the student can receive the best translation services that that interpreter can offer.

## **Chapter Four: Discussion of Strategies for Classroom Support**

The results of the provided interviews provide a broad investigation of how to support d/Deaf students in the classroom, which can be separated into key strategies that can be used to support these students. Discussing how to initiate support for d/Deaf students in the classroom is an important first step to ensure that each student's needs are distinguished and met. The need for qualified interpreters is significant to provide and mediate students' needs in the classroom. Considering these factors, instructors can review their classroom structure and function to ensure that all students are able to access their materials and course content to succeed in their courses.

### **Initiation of Support**

When working with d/Deaf students, there is a need for the university to provide support that leads them to success; however, there is also the expectation for all students at the college level to have independence and agency over their learning and support. Any d/Deaf student who requires additional services such as an interpreter or a note-taker must first define their needs to their university's accessibility office, which can offer further support to the students and their instructors. Once the university's accessibility office approves the student's request, the student must then discuss their individual preferences for interaction with their interpreters and educators.

As noted by the interpreter who I interviewed, interpreters oftentimes will step forward to help navigate the roles with the direction of the d/Deaf students, but they may not always be needed to help mitigate those situations. Once the rapport has been



established with both the students and their interpreters, instructors can then reach out to both parties as needed to ensure their students receive the support that they need.

The suggested practices presented by participating instructors of FYC do not change the boundaries within which each of their students choose to work. Rather, their suggestions show the importance of guiding students towards the development of their writing practices and supporting them through their language development.

### Interpreter Support

One of the key components to supporting d/Deaf students in their language development ultimately rests in how interpreters support each student. By establishing early communication with the instructor, interpreters can advocate for d/Deaf students and determine with the instructors what needs to take place while collecting materials and information that will prove to be useful when interpreting, thus supporting the individualization of each student's support. Interpreters can also provide basic cultural information that will support the d/Deaf student, such as requesting the instructor watch the student rather than the interpreter when communicating and requesting the instructor to be mindful of where educators position themselves in the classroom.

Although Student 1 experienced having only one interpreter in the classroom for three d/Deaf students, typically multiple interpreters are provided to support each student's access needs. According to the National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes, typically the number of interpreters that are provided directly relates to the amount of time they are needed ("Sign Language Interpreters" 3). However, the number of interpreters present also is impacted by the number of students who require

interpreting services; good interpreter practices would provide two or three interpreters for a situation where there is more than one d/Deaf student to provide full accommodations for each student in the classroom. At the university where this study took place, typically two interpreters work together to support each student, taking turns throughout the class time.

In Student 1's experience, their interpreter was unable to provide clear access to the conversation because of turn-taking factors. The complications of interpreting described by Long and Beil, such as the presence of interpretation lag, were compounded in Student 1's situation because of the interpreter's need to support three students instead of one, leading to few opportunities for these students to work with their hearing peers in group settings. In their discussion of Ross's experience, Ross and Yerrick state that such scenarios lead educators to need to decide whether communication amongst peers or understanding of presented concepts are more important for the tasks provided to the students. While an ideal end-result is unattainable in this situation due to the communication circumstances, measuring the importance of each task in relation to the intended goal aids educators to find what practice is best for the student.

An interpreter's preparedness and the classroom setup also greatly factor into the way that a student is supported during class, as the interpreter might not be able to see the full class. In addition, they might not have enough time to clearly translate for their students to be able to fully access what is occurring during classroom dialogue. In Berge and Thomassen's study, they found that one d/Deaf student in their study couldn't contribute to conversation or offer feedback because the instructor wouldn't give enough time for the interpreter to translate before moving on to the next subject (191). An

interpreter's role of mediating conversation greatly impacts who speaks when, but the primary mediator of turn-taking is the instructor, who manages dialogue for content and development within a chosen timeframe. By navigating roles and time management with interpreters, instructors can ensure that all students are able to participate during all planned activities.

As noted by Instructor 1 and Instructor 3, some d/Deaf students may disconnect from the class. In many cases, having an interpreter who is unable to provide clear translations tends to result in the student disconnecting (Berge and Thomassen). The student may be doing well on their own and choose such actions, or they may be falling behind. However, each student defines the space in which they work just as any hearing student would. Thus, they must be permitted to face the results of those actions on their own.

In contrast to Student 1's experience, Student 2 had no concerns with the interpreting process that took place. She noted that everything was clearly interpreted, and she received a lot of feedback from both interpreters present to make sure she felt comfortable with the communication process and support she was receiving. Student 2's experience demonstrates a positive, well-established environment was created at the beginning of the semester, and consistently maintained between the student, the interpreters, and the instructor to continue communication of support.

### Class Structure and Function

The function and structure of a class greatly impacts how students interact with their peers, instructors, and interpreters. Physical factors, such as sightlines between the

student, instructor, and interpreter, impact a student's ability to see and process information. Other factors, such as how activities are performed, impact a student's processing of information and collaboration with peers.

### *Working Together in Groups*

Many pedagogical practices typically rely on and promote students' learning development in group settings. Student 1's case with group work was much different than Student 2's because of the ratio of students to interpreters. Because Student 1 and her d/Deaf peers maintained their own group, they were unable to interact with the rest of the class. Grouping students with different classmates multiple times throughout the semester allows for them to receive a variety of feedback from other peers, who may present different contributions to their drafts, as well as gain more experience providing feedback to other students' work. This practice also helps students build rapport with each other in the classroom, as students must re-adjust each time they interact with a new group.

### *Building Rapport*

Developing rapport with the student was also a topic that was brought up by the ASL director, Instructor 3, and Student 2; when an educator builds rapport with their students, especially on an individual level, the students open up more to asking questions and contributing further to the learning environment that the educator has established. In addition, this solves many communication-based issues, such as mediating class discourse and making sure that each student understands everything that is being asked. Student 2's instructor took the initiative to check in with her regularly to ensure that she

was able to understand concepts clearly and was well-accommodated, resulting in her to be able to directly ask questions and succeed in the class overall. As demonstrated by Student 2's experience, the relationships between d/Deaf students and their educators that built on such rapport support d/Deaf students' engagement with the classroom and the material presented to them.

### *Technology*

The inclusion of technology can be beneficial for all parties involved, but how the technology is used proves to be most important. For d/Deaf students, the inclusion of closed captioning in videos is important so that they have access to the same content their peers do. Both Instructor 2 and Instructor 3 discerned that the inclusion of technology greatly supported their students through their learning and writing development. By working with various technologies and software to provide multiple options, such as both print and electronic copies of a document, students can access materials in formats that are accessible for them. Access to such technologies both in and outside of the classroom proved to be beneficial for d/Deaf students and their peers. When educators are willing to be flexible, they are able to adjust their teaching strategies to include multiple formats to be a standard function in all of the classes that they teach.

Many universities host technology resources that can help develop inclusive technology practices, such as generating closed captioning for videos that educators want to use. The university where I conducted my research hosts a variety of resources for educators in the university's main library, which provides a center for teachers, a technology center, and a separate accessibility center. Each resource provides experts

who guide and support educators as they develop inclusive teaching practices. Other resources concerning accessibility support can also be found at the university's accommodations office.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

The instructors of the university where I conducted my study actively adapt pedagogical practices and strive towards creating inclusive environments where students, interpreters, and educators are all able to support each other. In accordance with both the literature review and information provided by the interview participants, it is best to approach each d/Deaf student's communication situation individually so that each student can be supported in accordance to their needs. General shifts in accommodation, such as presenting materials in a variety of formats to students, moving seating arrangements so everyone is visible to each other, and maintaining one general space from which to lecture and facilitate, are communication adaptations that are useful for all students as they learn to collaborate with one other and develop their writing. Although significant changes shouldn't be needed to accommodate d/Deaf students, any such changes should be individually addressed with the d/Deaf student and their interpreter to ensure that all parties involved achieve their intended goal of communication. The best support that writing instructors can offer students is to gain awareness and seek out additional support services that can help educators navigate how to best accommodate these students.

### **Implications for the First Year Composition Classroom**

Based on the information provided by all participants, the support provided by educators needs to be addressed by developing and creating dialogue between all parties involved. Such discussions must be introduced by the instructor, as they are the participants of the situation who directly determine the overall classroom discourse and pace of instruction. The educator best supports a student's growth in their learning by

checking in regularly to ensure that the student is understanding all concepts involved. However, the student defines their own learning development overall based on the choices that they make for academic success.

As experienced by Instructor 1 and Instructor 3, many educators of writing will recognize the presence of a different discourse in the classroom. Rather than focus on that situation, each of the instructors worked with their students and interpreters to develop effective discourse with their students. As noted by Instructor 3, the students may need additional time for writing, but they still maintained a voice and unique writing style in the same way that his other students did. While acknowledging their students' writing to have ESL/ELL markers, both educators maintained the support for critical thinking and discourse as presented in the FYC course. The discussion of various Englishes may also prove to be more useful when addressing those markers, as displayed by Student 2's experience. Many FYC students enter the classroom questioning their grammar and structure, and while the course intends to focus on concepts of writing development rather than the technical aspects such as grammar, those students may become more comfortable sharing their own writing once they discuss variants of English and their purposes and origins are discussed with the entire class.

### Recommendations for Teachers of Writing

The support offered to educators of writing when working with d/Deaf students proves to be abundant and diverse in various areas of the study. Although students must be provided the autonomy to proceed through the course on their own, educators are able to present themselves as an ally and a guide to their students. If an educator begins and



continues the conversation of support with the student and their interpreter throughout the semester, the likelihood that the student succeeds is much higher than if that continued discussion and support is non-existent.

### *Begin the Conversation*

By contacting the d/Deaf student and their interpreter either before or early in the semester, educators are able to establish how to best address the student's communication needs within the classroom. Such conversations allow for the educator to gain useful information about how to address the student and their interpreter(s), and the discussion allows for the educator to build rapport with their student. For educators who have never worked with d/Deaf students before, these conversations can be crucial for gaining an understanding of how to best support their student through the course. Additional materials may also be useful to present at this time to ensure that the interpreter has the materials they need, and the student has access to any materials that they might need during class.

### *Note the Physical Traits of the Classroom*

Recognizing the physical traits that the classroom being used offers is good practice for educators, regardless of the students that enter the classroom. When addressing the room's design, educators can identify and maintain one space from which to address the classroom, ensuring that they do not accidentally step in front of the interpreter. This practice allows for educators to prepare how they will support their students through the course time, such as moving chairs into a circle or semi-circle to

allow for all students to see each other. Technology also can be addressed; if the educator uses PowerPoints or other similar software, they might review where the projection screen is in relation to their stance in the classroom.

### *Be Attentive to Student and Interpreter Needs*

Once rapport is built with students and their interpreters, the maintenance and continuation of that communication allows for educators to continue supporting their students throughout the semester, and it ensures that the student is connected with the instructor and their classmates. Continuing basic conversations builds trust between an educator and their students, so that if there is a concern that needs to be addressed later during the course, the student will likely be more comfortable with addressing it to the educator. Such practices should not be ignored when working with d/Deaf students when an interpreter is involved. In addition, practices of checking in with the student throughout the semester allow for the educator to ensure that the student is understanding central concepts clearly.

### *Recognize the Student's Language Background*

Many of the traits that d/Deaf writers present are similar to ESL students', and their writing needs to be addressed with such a lens. As demonstrated in Student 2's experience, by discussing various forms of English with the class, students are more likely to recognize and focus on their language development, using tools of analysis to address their own writing and recognize that their writing is accepted within the classroom. Practices of working in groups to discuss student writing is also very

beneficial for supporting d/Deaf and ESL students, as they are able to work directly with native speakers of English to review their work. Because of the language backgrounds that d/Deaf students have, the range of skills that they have for writing in academic settings may vary; thus, their writing should be addressed individually for the student to note and recognize where to improve their writing.

### *Acknowledge Additional Support Systems*

As with any other classroom, by addressing the university's support systems at the beginning of the semester in the syllabus to the class, such as the university's accommodations support office and university writing center, the educator provides options for all students, including the d/Deaf student. Such systems also provide additional resources for educators to refer to when working with students, and they can be beneficial for continuing the development of inclusive pedagogies.

### *Keep an Open Mind*

The range of students that a college educator supports is expansive far beyond just the support of d/Deaf students. The practices of reviewing the classroom and building rapport with students are applicable to any situation where students may need further support. By providing all materials in multiple formats, educators of writing can present and discuss how the texts are used and interpreted in those formats rhetorically while providing easy access. The key to supporting each student as they enter the classroom, however, is keeping an open mind to addressing their needs and concerns as they arise.

## Directions for Future Research

Although the results of this study show that FYC instructors at the university in question actively strive to provide positive experiences to their d/Deaf students, there is still much more to be assessed and learned from as more studies are created and developed further. Further development and renewal of the presented research will be required in various aspects to fully evaluate d/Deaf writers and the support they are provided in postsecondary academic writing classrooms. Such aspects include developments such as the addition of other institutions, the inclusion of factors such as use of cochlear implants and/or other technologies, and the addition of close observation of d/Deaf students' writing development over the course of a semester in the FYC course. The development of this data will allow for researchers and educators alike to achieve a clear, concise understanding of the challenges that d/Deaf students face in the FYC classroom overall, and to identify activities that best support their writing development.

While this study offers some strategies to support d/Deaf writers in the classroom, I found a plethora of additional questions that need to be addressed as research on this topic broadens and is further developed. At what rate does the literacy of d/Deaf students advance at the college level? How does Active Learning Design complement or negatively affect the support strategies currently provided? How are d/Deaf writers supported at other universities in their writing classrooms, and how do those experiences differ from the experiences found at the university discussed in this study? How do these differences vary regionally and/or demographically?

In the field of Writing and Rhetoric, the discussion of terms such as “literacy” and “competency” continues to be developed, but the terms need to be addressed in relation

to language transfer, particularly where the fields of Writing and Rhetoric, Linguistics, and Deaf Education intersect. To accurately assess d/Deaf students' writing practices at the postsecondary level, longitudinal studies could be used to inform the development of supportive curricula and teaching practices.

#### *A Call to Action: #WhyDisabledPeopleDropOut*

In Spring 2019 during the months of April and May, the hashtag #WhyDisabledPeopleDropOut gained popularity across Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and other primary social media forums. It quickly gained a wide, diverse audience globally as students with disabilities, faculty members of universities, and organizations began voicing their opinions on the social media platform about the services and support that they need from both campus services and educators. Unfortunately, for many of the contributors who identify as d/Deaf, many of the issues that have continued to the present relate directly to basic accessibility needs, such as closed captioning, offering intellectual challenges, and respect for the student. The continued discussion of classroom accessibility and communication support is needed, and the reactions and support provided on those platforms proves that work still needs to be completed.

#### *Continuing Research in Writing and Rhetoric*

As noted in Chapter 2, there is a new wave of research coming into the field of Writing and Rhetoric regarding Disability Studies and the creation of inclusive environments, and some of these accomplishments are by culturally Deaf writers. Stephanie L. Kerschbaum, a culturally Deaf teacher and researcher, discusses the impact

that disability studies has on classroom discourse in her text *Towards a New Rhetoric of Difference*. Janine Butler discusses the introduction of Closed Captioning as a method of writing that can be used in the writing classroom. Such research needs to continue to be advocated for and completed in order to support educators' understanding and development of supportive practices for d/Deaf students.

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## Curriculum Vitae

Stephanie Kay Meranda

### Education

- Master of Arts: English, earned at IUPUI | Indianapolis, IN | Summer 2020
  - Areas of Concentration: Writing and Literacy
  - Certificate: Teaching Writing
- Bachelor of Arts: English, earned at IUPUI | Indianapolis, IN | Spring 2017
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### Teaching Experience

Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis | Indianapolis, IN

- IUPUI Writing Program
  - Associate Faculty of English | Indianapolis, IN | Aug 2019 – Dec 2019
- IUPUI University Writing Center
  - Associate Faculty Consultant | Indianapolis, IN | Aug 2019 – Dec 2019
  - Graduate Research Assistant | Indianapolis, IN | Aug 2018 – May 2019
  - Graduate Writing Consultant | Indianapolis, IN | Aug 2017 – Aug 2018

### Awards

- Jessica Sauter Outstanding Writing Consultant Award | Apr 2019
- IUPUI University Writing Center Graduate Research Assistantship | AY 2018 – 2019
- Graduate Professional and Educational Grant | Mar 2018

#### Publications: Conference Presentations

- “*Writing Technologies and Active Learning Design in Writing Centers*” East Central Writing Centers Association Conference | Apr 2019
- “*Writing Center Approaches to Assessment*” IUPUI Writing Program Spring Workshop | Feb 2019
- “*d/Deaf Accommodations Approaches in the Writing Center*” East Central Writing Centers Association Conference | Mar 2018

#### Languages

- English—native language
- American Sign Language—sign with moderate proficiency

#### Memberships

- The Hoosier Writing Project, a site of the National Writing Project: Teacher-Consultant